

Unit Four: Main Teachings of Buddhism (Part I)

Since the enlightenment up to the passing away, in forty five years of his mission, the Buddha has taken enormous effort to approach the highest number of people, as many as possible, covering a vast area, which included several kingdoms such as Magadha, Kosala, Kuru, Pancāla and Vajji in north India, in order to convince them with his message. The message of the Buddha contained none other than what is truth (*saccam*), and what is good (*kusalam*), which he realized at his enlightenment, and the ways how to arrive at truth and the good. The Buddha presented his message to the people in different ways, according to their capacities of understanding. The different aspects of what the Buddha realized, have been recorded in the early Buddhist scriptures, known as *Tipiṭaka*.¹ Among the teachings of the Buddha, we can find the most fundamental doctrine as well as their correlative doctrines.

As we mentioned elsewhere, the most original teachings of the Buddha come under the names of the doctrine of *Paticcasamuppāda* (truth, the nature of the world) and the doctrine of *Nibbāna* (highest good) and these two doctrines are further analyzed into doctrines of Four Noble Truths. But, at the same time, we can have many correlated doctrines in different names, which have their relation to the main teachings in one way or other.

Teaching of Paticcasamuppāda

The Buddha realized the doctrine of *Paticcasamuppāda* as the result of an investigation into the true nature of the beings.² Therefore, it can be expected that this doctrine, directly and necessarily, may concern with the existence of beings. Really, the Buddhist solution to the question as to how the existence of beings is constituted, has been presented in accordance with this doctrine. It reveals the fact that the existence is conditioned by the causes. Existence is nothing but a continual series of causes and effects. This is clearly pointed out by the Buddha, by showing twelve link causal relations, in the explanation of the emergence of mass of suffering. In the Buddhist terminology, mass of suffering means none other than the existence of empirical personality. The special message given by the doctrine of *Paticcasamuppāda* is that the existence of being is not limited only to the present life span. It really comes down from the immemorial past and it further runs innumerable life spans, so long as the causes produce the effects. It can be terminated when the causes cease to be.

The principle of this conditionality or causality is expressed in the following way:

When this is, this is (*Asmim sati idam hoti*)
 From the emergence of this, this emerges (*Imassa uppādā idam uppajjati*).
 When this is not, this is not (*Asmim asati idam na hoti*).
 From the cessation of this, this ceases (*Imassa nirodhā idam nirujjhati*).³

As the law of dependent origination, this doctrine explicitly expresses that for the emergence of any phenomena, there should be the cause and without cause nothing comes into being. At the

¹ All the teachings of the Buddha have been recorded under three baskets (Ti-pitaka), namely, Sutta (discourses), Vinaya (discipline), and Abhidhamma (analytically and synthetically systematized doctrines).

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³ Nidāna-vagga, Samyutta-nikāya

same time, it emphasizes that from the cessation of causes, effects come to an end. This law rejects the independent existence of anything and affirms that everything depends on the causes and conditions. Both the extremes that is to say, existence without emergence as Upanishads suggested, and cessation without emergence as materialists pointed out, are impossible in the world according to the doctrine of *Paṭiccasamuppāda* realized by the Buddha. That was the reason for rejecting both eternalism and nihilism, which existed in the religious background of the Buddha.⁴

The *Paṭiccasamuppāda* in its most popular sense is the explanation of existence in *samsāra*. There, we can find how causes are responsible for producing the effect. The whole *samsāric* process of existence has been taken into 12 factors as follows:

- Ignorance (*Avijjā*) leads to or conditions mental formations (*Samkhāra*)
- Mental formations (*Samkhāra*) lead to or condition consciousness (*Viññāṇa*)
- Consciousness (*Viññāṇa*) leads to or conditions name and form (*Nāma-rūpa*)
- Name and form (*Nāma-rūpa*) lead to or condition six faculties (*Salāyatana*).
- Six faculties (*Salāyatana*) lead to or condition contact (*Phassa*).
- Contact (*Phassa*) leads to or conditions feeling (*Vedanā*)
- Feeling (*Vedanā*) leads to or conditions craving (*Tanhā*)
- Craving (*Tanhā*) leads to or conditions grasping (*Upādāna*)
- Grasping (*Upādāna*) leads to or conditions existence (*Bhava*)
- Existence (*Bhava*) leads to or conditions birth (*Jāti*)
- Birth (*Jāti*) leads to or conditions decay, death, grief, lamentation, pain, unpleasantness, and distress (*Jarā-maraṇa-soka-parideva-dukkha-domanassa-upayāsa*).

This explanation of causally conditioned existence should not be taken as the final analysis of the causal relation of the existence. Buddhism does not accept one single cause for the emergence of anything. Emergence is the product of different causes. Therefore, the causes given in the twelve factors' *Paṭiccasamuppāda* are to be understood as the principal causes, without which the relevant effects can not emerge. In many discourses, the Buddha, according to the necessity, gave different causes to explain certain phenomenon.

The above mentioned principle of conditionality clearly points out that it is the principle of emergence, as well as the principle of cessation. The principle of cessation is given in the formula in the last two lines as "when this is not, this is not; from the cessation of this, this ceases". In the twelve factors' formula, it is given in the descending order:

Through the complete cessation of ignorance, mental formations cease; through cessation of mental formations, consciousness ceases...through the cessation of birth, decay, death, etc., cease.

It should be mentioned here that whenever the Buddha presented twelve factors' formula of the doctrine of *Paṭiccasamuppāda*, both ascending and descending orders were given to emphasize respectively the emergence and the cessation of the suffering.⁵

⁴ Kaccānavacchagotta-sutta, Samuttha Nikāya

⁵ S. Nidāna vagga

The Doctrine of Four Noble Truths

The emergence and the cessation of beings as realized by the Buddha are explained under the title of Four Noble Truths.⁶ The real nature of emergence of the being is further analyzed into the nature of what is emerged or produced and the way of emergence or production. The nature of what is emerged is explained by the Buddha under the title of Noble Truth of Suffering (*Dukkha-ariyasacca*) and the way how the emergence come into being is explained under the Noble Truth of Emergence of Suffering (*Dukkha-samudaya-ariyasacca*). The principle of cessation described in the doctrine of *Paṭiccasamuppāda* is further analyzed into the nature of cessation (Noble Truth of Cessation of Suffering) (*Dukkha-nirodha-ariyasacca*) and the way of cessation (Noble Truth of the Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering) (*Dukkha-nirodha-gāmani-patipadā-ariyasacca*).

Noble Truth of Suffering (*Dukkha-ariyasacca*)

The truth of suffering deals with the real nature of the existence of beings. As discussed under the doctrine of *Paṭiccasamuppāda*, existence of the being is the continual process of production of the causes and conditions. The true nature of what is produced by the causes and conditions is that it is subjected to destruction (*Yam kimci samudaya-dhammam sabbam tam nirodha-dhammam*).⁷ Therefore, the existence of being, in other words, is a series of production and destruction. There are three characteristics inherited by what is causally produced, namely, impermanence (*Anicca*), suffering (*Dukkha*) and non-ego (*Anatta*). The term *Samkhata*, or *Samkhāra* is the name for what is produced causally or conditionally. Those three characteristics are invariably accompanied with *sankhāra*-s. This true nature of the existence of beings is explained in the doctrine of the first truth.

In the doctrine of the First Noble Truth, *dukkha* or suffering does not mean only physical and mental suffering or painfulness as we generally understand from the word *Dukkha*. It has a wider meaning connoting different aspects of suffering. While explaining the Noble Truth of Suffering in his first sermon (*Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta*), the Buddha mentioned that the five aggregate of grasping is suffering, in brief.⁸ This is further attested to by the Buddha by saying: "O Bhikkhus, what is *dukkha*? It should be said that it is the five aggregate of grasping."⁹

Existence of being is analyzed in Buddhism into five aggregates of grasping in order to give a better understanding of the nature of the existence. The five groups of aggregates are forms (physical aspect - *Rūpa*), feelings (*Vedanā*), perceptions (*Saññā*), mental formations (*Samkhāra*), and consciousness (*Viññāna*). These five groups of aggregates of grasping are really contained in the factors given in the formula, which explains the emergence of the existence of beings in accordance with the doctrine of *Paṭiccasamuppāda*. All the groups of aggregates of grasping exclusively come under *Sankhāra* as they are causally conditioned. The most fundamental characteristics of causally composite things, as earlier mentioned, are impermanence or change (*Anicca*), suffering (*Dukkha*) and non-ego (*Anatta*). Impermanence itself is suffering. Whatever is

⁶ Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta of Samyutta Nikāya

⁷ Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta, S.

⁸ Ibid

⁹ S. 111 (PTS), p.158

impermanent is suffering (*Yadaniccam tam dukkham*).¹⁰ Causally conditioned emergence necessarily leads to change and destruction. It is the nature of beings that they are always delighted with permanence of what they like. When it is not there, it leads to the disappointment in the mind of beings, so it is suffering. This suffering, generated by change, (*Viparināma-dukkha*)¹¹ covers one aspect of *dukkha* in the Noble Truth of Suffering.

Apart from this aspect of suffering, beings are subjected to different kinds of physical and mental sufferings due to different reasons, such as birth, decay, death, sorrow, grief, lamentation, despair, distress, association with unpleasant people or such conditions, separation from pleasant people or such conditions, not receiving what one likes, and getting what one dislikes. This kind of suffering, which is commonly accepted as suffering (*Dukkha-dukkha*), is also included in the Noble Truth of Suffering.¹²

Whatever is impermanent and suffering is unsubstantial. There is nothing to be taken as substance or immutable soul. This non-ego of the being is shown by the Buddha with the analysis of the being into five groups of aggregates. It is pointed out that there is nothing permanent within or outside the five groups of aggregates.¹³ The concept of soul is by definition permanent, conscious and blissful (*Sat cit ānanda* or *sukha*). Causally conditioned existence of the beings has nothing to do with the permanent soul or substance. Hence, it is suffering. This dependent nature or non-self nature of the existence of beings is itself suffering. This is known as *Samkhata-dukkha*, which covers the third aspect of the Noble Truth of Suffering. It is undeniable that Buddhism accepts different kinds of happiness obtainable by the beings, especially by the human beings from their within and without. At the same time, it is unequivocally stressed, that none of them has permanent status, and they finally turn to be unhappiness or suffering, for they all come under the category of *Samkhata*, or what is produced by the causes and conditions. Therefore, the truth of suffering presented by the Buddha is by no means a pessimistic interpretation of the nature, but certainly, a realistic one.

Noble Truth of Emergence of Suffering (*Dukkha-samudaya-ariyasacca*)

The second truth reveals the way how the suffering comes into being. As earlier pointed out, suffering is nothing but the existence of being, or in other words, existence of five groups of aggregates. We have already discussed the way how this existence arises under the doctrine of *Paṭiccasamuppāda*. If it is so, then does this truth of emergence of suffering reveal another way of emergence of the existence? No, it certainly does not. It also explains the conditional arising of existence in accordance with the doctrine of *Paṭiccasamuppāda*. The only difference is that the truth of emergence of suffering starts with another factor or cause, that is to say, craving or clinging (*Tanhā*) instead of Ignorance (*Avijjā*) in the twelve factors' formula of *Paṭiccasamuppāda*.

Whatever has a conditional existence has no one original root cause, as every cause is conditioned by another cause or causes. Even the ignorance is not a first cause or uncaused cause, as the eternalists ascribe it to the concept of soul. The whole existence of causal genesis has to be understood as a cyclic existence for it has no starting point. Therefore, it is possible to begin from any cause out of the causal cycle as a starting point in the explanation of existence

¹⁰ Anattalakkhana-Sutra, M.

¹¹ ‘*Anicca dukkhā viparinādhammā*’- Mahā dukkhakkhandha-sutt, M I (PTS) p.90

¹² S. Dhammadakkappavattana-sutta

¹³ Ibid.

or suffering. The Buddha has pointed out craving as the cause of suffering in his first sermon, for the simple reason that it is the most approximate and most powerful cause for the emergence of suffering. The proximity of the craving to the emergence of suffering is quite evident, even from the twelve factors' formula when it says: "Through craving (*Tanhā*) is conditioned grasping (*Bhava*); through grasping is conditioned becoming; through becoming is conditioned birth (*Jāti*)."¹⁴ Becoming (*Bhava*) and birth (*Jāti*) together constitute the emergence of suffering or existence of a being as is conventionally accepted.

The craving is considered as the most powerful cause for the emergence of suffering. Introducing the craving as the cause for suffering, the Buddha stated its nature as follows:

"It is this craving which produces re-becoming (*ponobhavikā*), and which is bound up with passionate greed (*nandirāgasahagatā*), and which finds fresh delight now here and now there (*tatratastrābhinandini*), namely, craving for sense-pleasure (*kāma-tanhā*), craving for existence (becoming) (*bhava-tanhā*) and craving for non-existence (*vibhava-tanhā*)."¹⁵

According to this explanation of craving, it has the characteristics of producing re-becoming or re-existence of greed, which gets attached to existence and sense objects (*nandirāga*), of delighting now here and now there, and of craving for sensory pleasure and existence or non-existence. All these characteristics of craving express its commanding power to bind up the being with the re-becoming and re-existence. So, it does not allow the being, who is with it, to free himself from the *Samsāric* bond.

Craving is the immediate cause, not only for the arising and existence of being or in other words, five aggregates (suffering), but also for all sorts of miseries, evils, problems and struggles, which come under sufferings and appear in individual life or social life of the beings.¹⁶ Sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and distress are the results of that kind of miseries. Very famous stanza of Dhammapada emphasizes that *because of craving, sorrow and fear come to be*.¹⁷

In the second noble truth, it is mainly intended that the craving is the cause of emergence of five aggregates grasping, which is the *dukkha* in the philosophical sense of Buddhism (p.13). Craving leading to grasping (*tanhā paccayā upādānam*), produces volitional formations (*samkhāra*). Volitional formation or in other words, *kamma*-s are mainly responsible for producing future renewed existence. One of the discourses in *Samyutta nikāya* nicely explains this situation in the following way:

"Brethren, what one intends and what one plans and whatever one has a tendency: this becomes a basis for the persistence of consciousness. When there is a basis there is a support for the establishing of consciousness. When consciousness is established and has come to growth, there is the production of future renewed existence. When there is the future of renewed existence, then there arise decay-and-death, grief, suffering, sorrow and despair. Such is the origin of this entire mass of suffering."¹⁸

¹⁴ *Nidāna-vagga, Samyutta-nikāya*

¹⁵ *Dhammadakkappavattana-sutta*

¹⁶ M 1, p.86

¹⁷ 'Tanhāya jāyati soko tanhāya jayati bhayam'. Dhammapada.

¹⁸ Connected discourses of the Buddha (*Nidāna vagga, Samyutta nikāya*)

In this quotation, 'what one intends', 'what one plans' and 'what one has a tendency' refer to volitional formations. These volitional formations become the object for a new consciousness to arise in the renewed existence. Consciousness and the name and forms (*nāma-rūpa*) arise together simultaneously, being mutually conditioned.¹⁹ Emergence of new consciousness together with name and forms is nothing but the five aggregates of grasping, in other words, the suffering.

Further, the relationship between craving and the volitional formation, which has direct connection with the future becoming and birth (*dukkha*), was brought out by the Buddha in the following way:

"If there be passion, brethren, if there be delight, if there be craving as to solid food, it is there that consciousness is firmly placed and comes to growth. Where consciousness is firmly placed and comes to growth, there is a descent of name and form. Where there is a descent of name and form, there is growth of volitional formation (*sankhāra*). Where there is a growth of volitional formation, there in the future is renewed becoming and birth. Where in the future is renewed becoming and rebirth, there in the future is decay and death."²⁰

Ignorance and craving are the two main factors that provide the driving force for the continuation of existence. The Buddha has pointed out:

'O Bhikkhus, this cycle of continuity is without a visible end, and the first beginning of beings wandering and running round enveloped in ignorance (*avijjā*) and bound down by the fetters of craving (*tanha*) is not to be perceived.'²¹

In the twelve factors' formula of *Paṭiccasamuppāda*, ignorance has been taken as the first factor in order to show the whole *samsāric* continuation of suffering in the past, present and future. According to the explanation given by Venerable Buddhaghosa, factors of ignorance and volitional formations belong to the past existence, while consciousness, name and forms, six faculties, contact, feelings, craving and grasping belongs to the present existence. Becoming, birth, decay, and death etc. belong to the future existence.²² It can be supposed that the Buddha had the intention to show how the future existence of being comes into being in his introduction of the Second Noble Truth. Hence the Buddha may have presented craving as the source of suffering.

On the other hand, there is another important point to be discussed here, regarding the question as to why the Buddha has taken craving as the cause of suffering in the second noble truth. As we all know that the strength of a cycle depends on its weakest point. Craving is not only the immediate cause for the arising of suffering, it is also the weakest and easily breakable factor among the other factors of the cycle of existence, for craving is the spontaneous activity of the being. Except ignorance and volitional formation, all the other factors come into being as a natural process. The being has not any responsibility for their emergence. But the craving on the contrary, arises as the result of the will (*chanda*) of the being. Therefore, if the being wills to stop craving, he can do it and achieve the freedom from suffering. The Buddha's main purpose of

¹⁹ *Vinnana paccaya namarupam namarupa paccaya vinnam*

²⁰ Kindred Saying, p.71

²¹ S 11, pp.178-179; 111, pp. 149, 151.

²² *Visuddhimagga, Paññābhumi niddesa*

preaching the doctrine of the Four Noble Truths was to show the possibility of achieving the liberation of suffering.

Anyhow, there does not arise a question of contradiction by showing ignorance as a factor for emergence of suffering in one place and craving in another place.

Noble Truth of Cessation of Suffering (*Dukkha-nirodha-ariyasacca*)

We came to know that the terms such as existence of beings, five groups of aggregates of grasping and suffering, in the context of being in Buddhism, have no different connotation and they refer to one and the same thing. That is to say, in most popular Buddhist term, *Dukkha*. The Buddha realized in his enlightenment, the way of emergence of *Dukkha* and its cessation through the understanding of the doctrine of *Paṭiccasamuppāda*. The purpose of the Buddha to present what he has understood and realized to mankind, was to make them realize the nature of suffering, the way of its emergence, its causation and the way of its cessation. In the Third Noble Truth, the Buddha put forward the cessation of suffering, the realization of which, is the final goal of Buddhism.

Suffering, as the word denotes, is a long standing and long lasting burden. This burden has to be kept away. Keeping away of the burden is itself the freedom. The only one available way of keeping the suffering away is to destroy its root cause, the craving. "What is produced by the causes ceases to be, with the destruction of causes."²³ It is the law realized by the Buddha, which is applicable to the entire universe. Both emergence and cessation are correlative and coincided in what is produced. Seeing this inevitable nature of things in the world is called eye of Dhamma (*dhammacakkhu*).²⁴ People arrive at the wrong conclusion such as eternalism, and nihilism regarding the beings and things in the world, as the result of not seeing properly this dual characteristics inherited by the beings and the things.²⁵

When the cause for suffering is the craving as we saw in the Second Noble Truth, then its cessation inevitably implies the complete destruction of craving. Therefore, the Buddha introduces the Third Noble Truth as 'it is the complete cessation of that very craving, giving it up, renouncing it, emancipation from it, detachment from it'.²⁶

Though this state of cessation of suffering is variously described in Buddhist discourses, all the descriptions ultimately referred to the same state of emancipation from suffering, achieved through the destruction of defilements, which is responsible for the emergence of suffering.

Ariyapariyesana sutta describes it as 'calming of all volitional formations, giving up all defilements, extinction of craving, detachment, cessation, nibbāna'.²⁷

The most popular term for this state of detachment is *Nibbāna*, which means the extinction from all cankers (*sabbūpadhipatinissaggo*). The term *nibbāna* always refer to extinction from suffering

²³ *Hetum paticca sambutam hetubhanga nirujjhati*

²⁴ *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta*.

²⁵ *S. Kaccāna- vacchagotta-sutta*.

²⁶ *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta*.

²⁷ *M. Arriyapariyesana sutta*

(*dukkhakkhaya*), extinction from defilements (*kilesakkhaya*), extinction from cankers (*āsavakkhaya*), and so on.

When we examine the definitions and descriptions given to this state of affairs in the early Buddhist discourses, it is interesting to note that most of them appeared in the negative sense. The following are the examples:

- Tanhakkhaya* (cessation of craving)
- Nirodha* (cessation)
- Nibbāna* (extinction, blowing out)
- Virāga* (detachment)
- Dukkhakkhaya* (cessation of suffering)
- Asamkhata* (unmade or unconditioned)

All these words represent nothing positive in the *Nibbāna*. Disappearance of already existed suffering or some positive elements, which cause suffering, is itself *Nibbāna* or emancipation. Though these negative terms negate something, which existed before *Nibbāna* is achieved, it should be clearly emphasized here, that they do not negate the *Nibbāna* itself. It is an experience, which should be individually known by the wise (*paccattam veditabbo viññūhi*). It is a knowledge arising in the mind of an Arahant, who is said to have annihilated all the cankers (*vimuttasmin vimuttamiti ñānam hoti*).²⁸

Cessation of suffering (*dukkhanirodha*) implies stoppage of an already existing suffering in a way that it never arises again. Therefore, *Nibbāna* means extinction itself; nothing more than that. The questions such as whether *Nibbāna* exist or not are meaningless, for any answer to such a question is not applicable to *Nibbāna*. It is beyond our sensory phenomenon. Even the true nature of the existence of suffering can not be labeled with the term such as existence or non-existence. If it is so, how can we describe the extra-sensory perception of *Nibbāna*? Usually people come to the judgment of something seeing its existence and non-existence.²⁹ *Nibbāna* is beyond the territory of existence and non-existence.

Noble Truth of Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering (*Dukkha-nirodha gāmini patipadā-ariyasacca*)

In the Second Noble Truth, it is pointed out that suffering arises mainly because of the craving. In the real sense here, craving represents all kinds of defilements, such as hatred and conceit. With the eradication of craving, all sorts of defilements come to an end. That is the reason why the cessation of suffering is called cessation of defilements (*kilesakkhaya* or *Āsavakkhaya*). For the eradication of all defilements headed by craving, the Buddha prescribed a path which leads to the cessation of suffering. This path is generally known as middle path (*majjhimā patipadā*), which consisted of eight factors. Therefore, it is known as the Noble Eightfold Path (*ariyo atthangiko maggo*).

The eight factors are given below as follows:

²⁸ *Sāmaññaphala-sutta, Dighanikāya*

²⁹ *Disvana loke vibhavam bhavam ca – vinicchayam kurute jantu loke.*

- Right Understanding or right vision (*sammā titthi*)
- Right Thought or right aspiration (*sammā sankappa*)
- Right Speech (*sammā vācā*)
- Right Action (*sammā kammanta*)
- Right Livelihood (*sammā Ajiva*)
- Right Effort (*sammā vāyāma*)
- Right Mindfulness (*sammā sati*)
- Right Concentration (*sammā Samādhi*)

The path, consisting of the above mentioned factors, is called middle path as it is going against two extremist paths, which were accepted in the religious and social background of the Buddha, namely, self indulgence (*kāmasukhallikānuyoga*), which seeks the happiness through the sensory gratification, and self mortification (*attakilamathānuyoga*), which aimed at the emancipation through vigorous ascetic practices. According to the Buddha, one who seeks the cessation of suffering through a religious life should avoid these two extremes.

The middle path presented by the Buddha aims at the complete eradication of defilements through the perfection of threefold disciplines (*tisso sikkhā*), namely, ethical conduct (*Sīla*), mental concentration (*Samādhi*) and wisdom (*Paññā*).³⁰ We can categorise the eight factors of the path under the threefold discipline in the following manner:

- Ethical conduct (*sīla*):
- Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood
- Mental concentration (*Samādhi*):
- Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration
- Wisdom (*paññā*):
- Right Understanding and Right Thought

According to the order given in the eight factors, threefold discipline should be shown respectively as Wisdom, Ethical Conduct and Mental concentration. If the path is a gradual process, it should have to start with Right speech which comes under ethical conduct. Really, the Noble Eightfold Path is a gradual process. Though any one can follow it starting from any point according to one's own capacity, one must be endowed with the qualities represented by the factors starting from right view, for it is the quality which should accompany all the other factors of the path. Then, there arises a question as to how can it be a gradual process without starting from the ethical conduct and end with the wisdom, and why right understanding and right thought, which come under wisdom, come first in the path?

Right Understanding or Right Vision

The Noble Eightfold Path as we know, is a means to an end, which is known as the cessation of suffering. It can be achieved through the wisdom accompanied by perfection of ethical conduct and mind culture. When we have the insight knowledge into the real nature of beings or things as they are (*yathābhūtañānadassana*), as shown in the doctrine of *Paṭiccasamuppāda*, then only can we have the detachment which leads to the emancipation (*virāga vimucati*).³¹ Therefore, the wisdom in the full sense can not be there at the beginning point of the path. On the other hand, this whole process of the path must proceed with the understanding of nature of the

³⁰ Cula-vedalla sutta of Majjhimanikaya

³¹ Samannaphala-stta of Dighanikaya

suffering, its emergence, its cessation and the path leading to its cessation. This understanding of the Four Noble Truths does not necessarily imply insight wisdom of the Four Noble Truths. It is really a right vision (*sammā ditthi*) or right understanding or a preliminary wisdom about the four truths, which is achievable through one's own wise attention (*yoniso manasikāra*) or religious authority (*paratoghosa*).³² If one does not have such a right vision, one does not follow the path. Therefore, right vision is considered as the forerunner of all the factors.³³ It is really a prerequisite of the path; an indispensable factor for the progress of the path.

Right Thought

The second factor, Right Thought or Right Aspiration, also come under the category of wisdom. It is really a result of the Right Vision. One who has some sort of understanding about the Four Noble Truths, does not strictly attach to the sensory pleasure. Therefore, there is a right aspiration of renunciation or detachment (*nekkamma-sankappa*). Further, in one's mind that has the right vision, there would not be hatred. Instead, one has the aspiration of non-hatred (*avyāpāda-sankappa*) and both aspirations of renunciation and non-hatred together produce loving kindness; in other words, the right aspiration of non-violence (*avihimsā-sankappa*).

Right vision (*samā-ditthi*) and right thought (*sammā-asankappa*) thus lead to right speech (*sammā-vācā*), then to right action (*sammā-Kammanta*) and finally to right livelihood, which together constitute the ethical perfection. Now it is clear why wisdom precedes and ethical conduct follows in the eightfold path.

Right Speech

When one's mind is endowed with right vision and right aspiration, it does not produce a mentality which leads to the wrong speech, which is comprised of (1) lying (*musāvādā*), (2) slandering (*pisunāvācā*), (3) harsh words (*pharusā vācā*), and (4) idle talk (*samphappalāpā*). These forms of wrong or bad speech are harmful to both the speaker and the listener for they are responsible respectively, for cheating and dishonesty, disunity and disharmony, hatred and anger, and empty gossip, which wastes valuable time. Contrary to the bad speech, right speech respectively brings about truth and trust, friendly and benevolent talks, pleasant and polite talk, and meaningful and useful talk.

Right Action

Our speech and action are respectively verbal and bodily expressions of what is first rooted in our mind. When our mind is endowed with right vision and right thought, it does not generate greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*) and ignorance (*moha*), which find expression through wrong verbal speech and wrong bodily actions. Instead, it produces non-greed (*alobha*), non-hatred (*adosa*) and non-ignorance (*amoha*), which find expression through right speech and actions.

Right action is abstinent from wrong bodily behaviors namely, killing or hurting others (*pānaghāta*), stealing (*paraddabba*) and wrong sexual conduct (*paradāra*). These forms of right

³² Sammaditthi-sutta of Majjhimanikaya

³³ Ibid

action of the middle path clearly lead one to protect human rights, particularly, the right of living peacefully and right of having properties.

Right Livelihood

Buddhism prescribes a way of livelihood which does not bring harm or suffering to the lives of others. It is a livelihood, which should be earned through righteous, honest, blameless and rightful professions. All kinds of wrong means of living, such as trickery and cheating in trade, and harmful selling in weapons or arms, living beings, meat, intoxicating drinks, and poison, have to be given up in the right livelihood.

Right speech and right action together with right livelihood constitute the ethical perfection in the path based respectively, on the conviction of the nature of the existence through the right vision, and loving kindness through the right aspiration.

Right Effort

Right effort provides a preliminary step towards the proper mental concentration. It consists of four kinds of effort (*cattāro sammappadhāna*) motivated by the will power (*chandam janeti, viriyam ārabhati*).³⁴ The four kinds of effort are enumerated as follows:

- Effort to prevent the arising of unskillful states of mind
- Effort to overcome unskillful states already arisen in the mind
- Effort to produce skillful states already not arisen in the mind
- Effort to develop skillful states already arisen in the mind.

This right effort provides the necessary background for the concentration of the mind by increasing wholesome or skillful states, such as non-greed, non-hatred and non-ignorance, and by reducing unwholesome or unskillful states, such as greed, hatred and ignorance.

Right mindfulness

Right mindfulness or attentiveness is a further conducive step, which facilitates development of one pointedness of the mind, by paying diligent attention to mental and physical phenomena, which come under four bases of mindfulness, namely, activities of body (*kāya*), feelings (*vedanā*), activities of mind (*citta*), and ideas and some dharmic points (*dhamma*). This same right mindfulness comes to be known as mindful-clear awareness (*sati-sampajañña*) in some discourses.³⁵ In the *Sāmaññaphala-sutta* of *Dighanikāya*, the Buddha explained the way how a monk practices mindful-clear awareness in the following manner:

'And how, Sire, is a monk accomplished in mindfulness and clear awareness? Here a monk acts with clear awareness in going forth and back, in looking ahead and behind him, in bending and stretching, in wearing his outer and inner robe, and carrying his bowl, in eating, drinking,

³⁴ S. *Saccavibhanga-sutta*

³⁵ D. *Samannaphala-sutta*

chewing and swallowing, in evacuating and urinating, in walking, standing, sitting, lying down, in waking, in speaking and in keeping silent, he acts with clear awareness.³⁶

Right Concentration

The last factor of the path, right concentration is an attempt to make possible, mind to concentrate by removing five impediments (*panca nivarana*), which are known as sensual lust (*kāmacchanda*), ill will (*vyāpāda*), sloth-and-torpor (*thīnamiddha*), worry-and-flurry (*uddhacca-kukkucha*), and skeptical doubt (*vicikicchā*). These impediments are considered to be the factors of weakening the wisdom (*paññāya dubbalīkarane*). Close attention towards a meditation object makes possible the removal of the impediments or hindrance from the mind, and as a result, there arises deep calmness in the mind, which generates trances (*jhanās*) belonging to both fine material (*rūpāvacara*) and immaterial (*arūpāvacara*) planes.

Right concentration is the crucial factor for achieving the aim or the end of the path. The aim of the Eight Noble Path is to realize the emancipation of suffering through knowing and seeing (*ñāna-dassana*) or in other words, insight knowledge (*paññā*). Concentrated mind is said to be purified and cleansed, unblemished, free from impurities, malleable, flexible and established. All these qualities of the mind are necessary for directing the mind towards the knowing and seeing the reality.³⁷

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Narada, *The Buddha and His Teachings*, Buddhist Missionary Society, Malaysia, 1988.

Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, Cambridge University Press, 1990.

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ "evam samahite cite mudubhute kammaniye thite anejjappatte nana-dassanaya cittam abhiniharati abhininnameti" D. Samannaphala-sutta.